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OUR LADY'S HOLINESS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In our endeavor to plot the holiness of Mary as described in the New Testament, it seems to me, we are required by logic to begin with an investigation of the Biblical concept of holiness. It is through this prism—the Biblical notion of holiness—that the facets of Mary's holiness ought to be studied if they are to be revealed in their full and true dimensions. It would make for anachronism to attempt to view Mary's holiness in the New Testament through the filter of latter day theories of sanctity, especially since some of these modern systems seem at times to be virtually alien in spirit and elaboration to the Biblical ideals of holiness.¹ The *modus operandi* here, then, will be first to isolate these ideals of holiness as delineated in the sacred text and then, as a second stage of study, to ascertain how and to what extent the Biblical ideals are encountered in the New Testament accounts of Mary.

At the outset it should be noted too, that in the large, the arguments will be drawn from the *Sitz im Evangelium* rather than from basic reality. That is to say, that the focus of attention will not be so much upon the event as it transpired in history as upon the report of that event as found in the Gospels. This is surely not to suggest any discrepancy between the two, but simply to make clear upon what level the argument moves. The emergent conclusions should therefore testify to the convictions of the New Testament community for whom these writers served as spokesmen.

Before proceeding it is necessary to remark further that this paper will observe one other, self-imposed guide line: it will

¹ L. Bouyer, *La spiritualité du Nouveau Testament et des Pères* (Paris, 1960) 13.

restrict its investigation for the most part to the moral holiness of Mary, not touching *ex professo* on the matter of Mary's ontological holiness. This is done without implication but simply to keep the study within reasonable limits.

A final preliminary is to serve notice that the concept of holiness is here taken in its broadest possible coverage as being any phase or state of soul that pleases God.

A Harmony of Wills:

Holiness is essentially a matter of the spirit. It is an interior posture and a thirst of the spirit that externalizes itself in a man's attitudes and his actions. Primarily, holiness is a matter of the will. A man is holy to the degree that his will is attuned to the will of God. This is the ideal relationship between God and man, when a man has his will on the same wave-length as God's will. What God wills, man must concurrently will. St. Paul writes often of this. E.g., *Phil.* 2: 12-13: "So, my dear friends, as you have always been obedient with reverence and awe make every effort to insure your salvation . . . For it is God who in his good will is at work in your hearts, inspiring your will and your action." This is to say, give vent to God's action within you, work along with Him. Because God is active within you now, you too must act and thereby let God's action come to fruition.²

God's will made manifest to a man is a call to that man to lock step with God. And so when a man by his *fiat* steps into line next to God, it is then that God's action becomes effective in man. This is the implication of Paul's words in *Col.* 1:29: "That is what I am working for, fighting with all the energy with which he so mightily endows me." The same intimation is in *John* 3:21: "But everyone who is living the truth will come to the light, to show that his actions have been performed in dependence upon God."

² This is the exegesis of *Phil.* 2:12-13 given by E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology* (New York, 1955) 181.

The grace of God craves actualization in man. It is a tide of energy; it is for man to raise the flood-gates and admit it to realization. II *Cor.* 12: 8-9: "Three times I have prayed to the Lord about this, begging that it might leave me, and he said to me, 'My grace is enough for you, for only where there is weakness is perfect strength developed.'" Also II *Tim.* 1: 6-7: "For this reason, I would remind you to re-kindle the divine gift that you received when I laid my hands on you. For the Spirit God has given us is a spirit not of timidity but of power, love and self-discipline."

This, then, is the right order of things when man's will harmonizes with that of God.³ This is what the New Testament calls for in the well-adjusted, in the holy man. Paul can think of no better wish to articulate for his friends than this, that God's will be gratified in them, that it be seconded by them. *Heb.* 13:20 ff: "May God the giver of peace . . . fit you by every blessing to do his will and through Jesus Christ carry out in us what will please him."

Into this niche hollowed out of a New Testament concept of holiness, it is easy to fit Mary. If as the New Testament unequivocally asserts, to please God one must accede to His will, Mary qualifies on the basis of one word: *Fiat*. By this utterance God gained entry into her.

It will have been noted that most of the texts cited above spoke of man agreeing with God's will in a context of God's salvific design. If this is the ideal situation, to will along with God in the matter of salvation, then Mary's assent to God's will is seen as something of a privileged instance. For it was Mary's generous acceptance of God's will that opened the way for the Incarnation, and therefore for the fulfillment of the whole broad sweep of God's plan of salvation.⁴ We may conclude, then, that

³ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁴ J. J. Weber, *La Vierge Marie dans le Nouveau Testament* (Paris, n.d.) 124. Bouyer writes: "With Mary, the acceptance of absolute dependence,

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in terms of the New Testament, Mary was pleasing to God for her *par excellence* acquiescence to His salvific will.

Mary as one of the Poor of Yahweh

In recent years we have been made increasingly aware of an element in Israel spoken of by the Scriptures as the *anawim*, the poor of Yahweh.⁵ These were "little" people, humble, unpretentious in their way of life and in their ambitions. They were poor in the sense that they were pitiful, altogether wanting in prestige, and respectability. Often enough, though, they were physically poor as well, destitute of worldly possessions. It was by God's design that this group had materialized on the scene.

Then I will remove from the midst of you
you proudly exulting ones

And you shall no more be haughty in my
holy mountain

For I will leave in the midst of you, a
people humble and poor.

And in the name of the Lord they shall
seek refuge.

The remnant of Israel

They shall do no wrong, nor shall they
tell lies

Nor shall there be found in their mouth a
deceitful tongue.

Zeph. 3: 11-13

These were people not favored with worldly goods and, therefore, not preoccupied with worldly concerns. Hence more readily did

or rather the total acceptance of the sole will of God, opens the gate of salvation." L. Bouyer, *The Seat of Wisdom* (New York, 1962) 32. In his *Theological Investigations*, 1 (Baltimore, 1961) 206, K. Rahner declares: "Mary stands at that point of saving history at which through her freedom the world's salvation takes place definitively and irrevocably as God's act..."

⁵ For a compact treatment of the phenomenon, cf. A. Gélín, *Les pauvres de Yahvé* (Paris, 1953).

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they turn to God. "In the name of the Lord they seek refuge."

Seek the Lord all you poor (*anawim*) of
the earth
Who do his will
Seek righteousness, seek humility.

Zeph. 2:3

These men, deprived of all material resource, easily understood that there was for them no other feasible recourse but to God.

This is the orientation to life that God desires in a man. It is for those so disposed, for the poor that God has reserved his favor.

Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord
For he has saved the life of the poor
From the hand of the wicked.

Jer. 20:13.

The poor it is who will constitute, "The Israel of God," the holy people. (*Is. 49:13*)

It is in Christ who is meek and humble of heart (*Mt. 11:29*) that the poor will find their vindication and their recompense. With Christ, the *sol justitiae*, there dawns for them their great hour, they shall have their day.

Blessed are the poor for they shall
Possess the Kingdom of God.⁶

Lk. 6:20

Also: *I Cor. 1:27-28*: "But it was what the world calls foolish that God chose to put the wise to shame with, and it was what the world calls weak that God chose to shame its strength with, and it was what the world calls low and insignificant and unreal that God chose to nullify its realities, so that in his presence no human being might have anything to boast of."

Of course it is not the actual poverty nor the misfortune or discrimination that constitute the merit of the *anawim*. It is just

⁶ J. Dupont, *Les béatitudes* (Louvain, 1954) 193 ff.

that these contingencies in life provide the proper climate for nurturing and for bringing to flower the Word of God and the grace of God. Scripture is sufficiently clear on that point.

In any case, it is fixed in just this context that we find the *Magnificat*.⁷ There is an undisguised effort to reach back and fold around Our Lady, like a mantle, the tradition of the *anawim*. This is the import of the phrases:

- for he has regarded the humility of his
handmaid
- he has dispersed the proud in the conceit
of their hearts
- he desposed the powerful
- he raised up the lowly
- the hungry he filled with good things
- the rich he sent away empty⁸

This conclusion is only reinforced by a study of the Old Testament counterparts of the respective verses of the *Magnificat*.⁹ The originals are revealed as firmly anchored in the theology of the *anawim*.

Quite obviously, in the same light must be viewed that other utterance of Mary: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word." Rather than frame her

⁷ L. Deiss, *Marie, Fille de Sion* (Paris, 1959) 143-160; B. M. Ahern, *Mary, Queen of the Poor* (St. Louis, 1962), originally published as *Mary and the Poor of Israel*, in *CCr* (Sept. 1959) 278-291.

⁸ Bouyer considers Mary in this attitude as fulfilling the Gospel of Christ. "Christ Himself according to St. Luke, sums up the whole Gospel in the blessing of the 'poor' as contrasted with the curse pronounced on the 'rich'. That is to say, those are blessed who place their entire hope and wealth in faith and obedience to the Father... that is His fundamental assertion that the Gospel fulfills the expectation of the 'poor' of Israel. [...] So what Mary really proclaims in the exultant hymn of gratitude which is the *Magnificat* is that the Gospel of her Son finds its first and perfect fulfillment in herself." L. Bouyer, *The Seat of Wisdom*, 36.

⁹ Old Testament parallels to the *Magnificat* are given by R. Laurentin, *Court traité de théologie mariale* (Paris, 1953) 24.

assent in other terms, this turn of phrase was used which is heavy with the suggestion of the *anawim* approach to life.

It may be of interest to note that Martin Luther for one was quite taken by the lowliness of Mary as he saw it affirmed in the New Testament. He speaks of Mary as an "armes Mägdlein," a poor little maid. He says she was "als gar nichts geachtet, und als eine der geringsten Bürgerinnen der Stadt gehalten . . ." that is, she was not at all esteemed and was considered to be one of the least important citizens of the town.¹⁰ In fact, one must say that in his enthusiasm for establishing the humility of Mary, Luther overreached himself. His exegesis of the respective passages is quite exaggerated.

For good measure, it may be pointed out that John Calvin, too, had this same impression of Mary's portrait in the New Testament; viz., that it depicts her as lowly and without standing in the community. Calvin wrote: "There is no doubt that St. Matthew and St. Luke felt compelled to show that Joseph and the Virgin Mary did not cease to be of royal descent *even though they were disparaged by the world and lived in poor circumstances.*"¹¹

The Justice of Mary

As is known, the Old Testament notion of justice covers, among others, the man who in his life and work does the will of God.¹² God has claims on man for devotion and service.¹³ To satisfy these claims is a basic duty of man.¹⁴ To hold back on this obligation is to violate justice, for God is robbed when that which is

¹⁰ Quoted in W. Tappolet, *Das Marienlob der Reformatoren* (Tübingen, 1960) 66-67.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹² O. J. Baab, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (New York, 1949) 117-118; G. F. Moore, *Judaism*, 2 (Cambridge, 1932) 89.

¹³ J. Hastings, *Dictionary of the Gospels*, 1 (Edinburg, 1906) 916; G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1 (London, 1962) 371; W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1 (London, 1961) 240-241.

¹⁴ To renege is severely castigated in *Dt.* 27:26: "Cursed be he who does not give effect to the provisions of this code by observing them."

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His due is not rendered. In *Mal.* 3:8 God says: "Should man rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say 'How have we robbed thee?' In the tithe and the contribution!"¹⁵

In the New Testament this specific concept of justice is known and applied. In I *John* 3:12 for example, the actions of Cain are called "wicked," those of his brother, "just." The just are considered to be those who, like Elizabeth and Zachary "observe blamelessly all the Lord's commands and requirements" (*Lk.* 1:6).

At times in the New Testament the relationship of just action to God is underscored.¹⁶ It is in the sight of God that a man's "just" pattern of behavior has a special value. Of Zachary and Elizabeth it is said they were *dikaioi enantion tou theou*—they were just before God (*Lk.* 1:6). It has been acutely remarked by Schrenk that often times in the various places in the New Testament where Jewish allusions are made or Jewish situations are discussed, precisely there, justice is conceived in the Old Testament sense as being the virtue of the man who through his faithful observance of the Law measures up to God's expectation of him.¹⁷

The point to be made is that Mary falls into the category of "justice" as described above. If it is not explicitly asserted of her in the New Testament that she was just, it is undeniable that she is presented in sequences that strongly imply this. The presentation in the Temple with its minute, prescribed ritual, the customary annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem (obviously Jewish customs), these are the responses of a pious soul to the requirements of the Law.

¹⁵ Köhler emphatically affirms the relationship between the Law and God's claims on man. "Denn das Gesetz ist nichts anderes als der Herrschaftsanspruch Gottes." L. Köhler, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, (Tübingen, 1953) 191.

¹⁶ Eichrodt points out that in the Old Testament there is an unmistakable link between faith and justice, between a man's belief in God and his observance of the Law. W. Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Part 2/3 (Stuttgart, 1961) 216.

¹⁷ G. Schrenk, art. "dikaios," in Kittel's *TWNT* 2 (Stuttgart, 1957) 191, #20.

These are actions characteristic of one who is "just" in the sight of God.

Mary's Spirit in Prayer

Greeven begins his article on New Testament prayer with the observation that there is nothing more characteristic of prayer in New Testament times than its certitude of being heard.¹⁸ The Christians of those days were persuaded of God's loving concern for them. Christ had spoken often and forcefully of this paternal interest of God in their affairs. "Do not sparrows sell five for two cents? And yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. But the very hairs on your heads are all counted! You must not be afraid, you are worth more than a great many sparrows! *Lk.* 10:6-7.

This pervasive interest of God in their lives, they felt, insured an answer to their prayers, and so it was they turned to God with unperturbed confidence. If anyone hesitated to trust his own deductions in the matter, there was Christ's outright assertion that God would honor their petitions. "Ask and what you ask will be given you. Search and you will find what you search for. Knock and the door will open to you." *Mt.* 7:7.

Whatever view one may have of the marriage feast at Cana, there is no question but that Mary's attitude as depicted in that account, breathes the same spirit of unbounded confidence. With stark basicity she is reported as saying simply: "Do whatever he tells you." No room is left here for the eventuality that God will leave the situation unalleviated. The point is that Mary clearly understood that God would have to intervene to ease the embarrassment of the host. And it is about this intervention of God that she has no hesitation.

There is yet another earmark of New Testament prayer that is observable in Mary's attitude on this occasion. New Testament

¹⁸ "Das Charakteristikum des urchristlichen Betens ist die einzigartige Erhörungsgewissheit." H. Greeven, in Kittel's *TWNT* 2, 802, #25.

prayer was nothing if it was not *engagé*, that is, it came to grips with the everyday situations in life. It was not a high-flown oration that disdained to involve God in mundane affairs by petitioning Him for worldly goods. There was no doubt as to what might fittingly be asked in prayer.¹⁹ Christ's example and His dictum on this point was plain enough. "Therefore I tell you, whenever you pray or ask for *anything*, have faith that it has been granted you, and you shall have it." *Mark* 11:24.

It is in line with this practical outlook in prayer that Mary makes her plea to rectify a predicament, a predicament that stems from a very worldly occurrence—the dearth of wine.

Not to be overlooked or slighted in this incident, is the delicate sense of charity exhibited by Mary. She makes the host's problem her own. There is in all this a readiness to get involved in a neighbor's troubles. This is in itself a Biblical virtue.

Finally, before leaving the account of Cana, one might delve into Johannine symbolism just long enough to see Mary as prefiguring the Church. She is the *Orante kar' exochen*. It is through her faith and prayer that this sign is accomplished.²⁰

In sum, then, one might say that in this snapshot of Mary at Cana, it is easy to make out the contours of a holy person. Both in what is said and what is left unsaid, Mary is deftly made to appear as a woman of refined holiness in a genuine New Testament sense.

Kecharitomene—highly favored One

Thus far our argumentation has proceeded from inferences. The New Testament record of Mary's respective words and acts has been scrutinized, and the attempt has been made to demonstrate that each of these vignettes unequivocally implies Mary's holiness . . . But it is not only by innuendo that the New Testa-

¹⁹ Cf. A. Hamman, *La prière; le Nouveau Testament* (Tournai, 1959) 141.

²⁰ Cf. Weber, *op. cit.*, 89.

ment speaks of Mary's sanctity, it makes a flat assertion of the same in the address of the angel to Mary in *Luke* 1:28: "*chaire, kecharitomene*." In the original Greek, as it seems, this is meant to be a play on words. It is impossible to reproduce the alliteration in English, but the semantic force of the word is clear enough. It is in part an assertion of Mary's privileged status with respect to salvation.²¹ This has been very felicitously formulated in German in the phrase: "Heil dir, der Heil widerfahren ist."²² A legitimate English translation for *kecharitomene* could be: "Thou who hast been highly favored by God."²³

The verb "*charitoo*" is rare in the New Testament. It occurs in just one other place, *Eph.* 1:6, where it refers to the conferral of God's grace. "So that we might praise the splendid grace which he has given us through his beloved Son." The word appears to denote, in the active voice, "to provide with grace."²⁴ In the pas-

²¹ Cf. T. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Lukas* (Leipzig, 1920) 81; A. Merk, *Das Marienbild des Neuen Bundes*, in P. Sträter (ed.), *Katholische Marienkunde*, 1 (Paderborn, 1947) 56. In his *Die Kirche und Maria* (Düsseldorf, 1958) 164, A. Kassing sees this assertion of Mary's personal privilege as set within the larger context of God's salvation plan and action among His people.

²² Cf. K. H. Rengstorff, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, in NTD (Göttingen, 1958) 24; J. Schmid, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Regensburg, 1951) 35. Lyonnet suggests that "*chaire*" be rather translated as "re-joice!" S. Lyonnet, *Le récit de l'Annonciation*, in *AdC* 66 (1956) 33-48. Cf. also his article entitled: "*Chaire kecharitomene*," in *Bibl* 20 (1939) 131-141. Following this suggestion, J. Galot, in his *Marie dan l'Evangile* (Paris, 1958) 23, manages to preserve the alliteration by translating the phrase as: "exulte, exaltée en grâce."

²³ Cf. J. M. Creed, *The Gospel according to St. Luke* (London, 1960) 17; W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, 1957) 887; H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (New York, 1897) 1716. The theological implications of the term are drawn out by R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Mother of the Savior* (St. Louis, 1959) 41 ff. For a point of view of the Vulgate translation of *kecharitomene* as "gratia plena," cf. C. Journet, *Esquisse du développement du dogme marial* (Paris, 1954) 34-35 and 76-77.

²⁴ Cf. H. A. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Epistle to Philemon* (Edinburgh, 1890) 42; L.

occurs in our text suggests a permanent, stable state of affairs.²⁵ There is, besides, an overtone of pre-eminence. That is to say, Mary is endowed with the grace of God to an eminent degree. This is intimated by the substitution of this participle (*kecharitomene*) for the proper name. It does not read, "Hail, Mary, highly favored by God," but simply "Thou, highly favored one," as though this designation pertained to Mary in a *par excellence* way.²⁶ It is such philological and syntactical considerations as these that form the background for the assertion of *Fulgens Corona*. That encyclical alludes to our word and to the expression "Blessed among women," and goes on to say: "by these words, as Catholic tradition has always interpreted, . . . it is shown that the Mother of God was the abode of all divine grace . . ."²⁷

Some commentators feel that *kecharitomene* is continued and explicatated by the phrase just following it: "The Lord is with you."²⁸ In other words, Mary is holy *because* the Lord is with her. It has been suggested, too, that the meaning of *kecharitomene* is explained and extended even further by verse 30: "thou hast found favor with God."²⁹

There is no need to pursue the examination of the text any

Cerfaux, *Gratia plena*, in *Mémoires et Rapports du Congrès Marial tenu à Bruxelles* [1921], 1 (Bruxelles, 1922) 37.

sive voice it would mean to receive grace. The perfect tense which

²⁵ Cf. L. Marechal, *Les Saintes Evangiles: S. Luc et S. Jean*, ed. Pirot-Clamer (Paris 1950) 27; E. Osty, *L'Evangiles selon Saint Luc*, in *Bible de Jérusalem* (Paris, 1953) 31; S. Garofalo, *Mary in the Bible* (Milwaukee, 1961) 11.

²⁶ Cf. M. J. Lagrange, *Evangile selon Saint Luc* (Paris, 1927) 28-29; M. Zerwick, *Analysis philologica Novi Testamenti graeci* (Rome, 1953) 130; G. Hilion, *La Sainte Vierge dans le Nouveau Testament*, in H. du Manoir (ed.) *Maria, Etudes sur la Sainte Vierge*, 1 (Paris, 1949) 47.

²⁷ Pius XII, *Fulgens corona*, in *AAS* 45 (1953) 579.

²⁸ Cf. Marechal, *op. cit.*, 27; also A. Plummer, *The Gospel according to St. Luke*, in *ICC* (New York, 1896) 21-22. Not all endorse this point of view. It is rejected, for instance, by K. Staab, *Markus-Lukas*, in *Echter Bibel* (Würzburg, 1956) 14-15.

²⁹ Staab, 15.

further. It would end in a discussion of Mary's ontological holiness, and this has been ruled out of bounds for this study. The fact remains that, as an unqualified assertion of Mary's holiness, *kecharitomene* is beyond challenge.

Conclusion

Up to this point various New Testament situations involving Mary have been put under study. It is time now to gather in the results of these individual investigations to see if they make for one grand conclusion.

It would seem that there are reflected in Mary several of the attitudes, orientations, modes of behavior that the New Testament inculcates or at least speaks of approvingly. Concurrence with the Divine Will, the spirit of lowliness, a spirit of confident prayer, all these are sketched in various places in the New Testament as the marks of the man who measures up to the ideal, the holy man. These same characteristics are demonstrably in the life of Mary as that life has been delineated for us in the New Testament.

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